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Message Text

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21
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 USIA-06 PRS-01 EB-07

COME-00 TRSE-00 INT-05 /064 W
---------- 014353
R 021210Z FEB 76
FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3747

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 1580

FOLNG SENT NEW DELHI INFO BOMBAY AND MADRAS FROM CALCUTTA
DTD 29 JAN.

QUOTE: CALCUTTA 0266

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: SWEL, IN
SUBJ: CHAS NALA
MINE DISASTER

1. ONE OF CONGEN'S FSL'S RECENTLY SPOKE WITH AGENT IN MINING EQUIPMENT WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM VISIT TO DHANBAD/JHARIA AREA, WHERE HE HAD DISCUSSED TM SOINE DISASTER WITH VARIOUS PEOPLE INVOLVED IN MINING THERE, AS WELL AS WITH LOCAL REPORTER FOR AMRITA BAZAR PATRIKA. ALTHOUGH WE CANNOT VOUCH FOR ACCURACY OF HIS ACCOUNT, IT HAS AN AUTHENTIC RING.

2. SOURCE SAID THAT ACCORDING TO MINING EXPERTS IN DHANBAD, AN INCORRECT SURVEY BY THE MINING AUTHORITIES CAUSED THE DISASTER. THE BARRIER BETWEEN THE OLD WATER-FILLED MINE AND THE ONE CURRENTLY BEING WORKED SHOULD HAVE BEEN 135 FEET INSTEAD OF 80 FEET.

3. HE HAD ALSO HEARD THAT BEFORE THE DISASTER ONE "OVERMAN" (FOREMAN)

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REFUSED THE ORDER OF AN ASSISTANT MANAGER TO

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PREPARE FOR BLASTING BY DRILLING HOLES BECAUSE HE THOUGHT
IT TOO RISKY. IT WAS ALSO SAID THAT THE OVERMAN BROUGHT
IN TO REPLACE THE FIRST ONE REPORTED THAT WHILE DIGGING
HOLES WATER WAS SEEPING IN. ACCORDING TO SOURCE, WATER
FILLED SHAFT UP TO DEPTH OF 900 FEET IN JUST THREE AND ONE
HALF MINUTES. THE VELOCITY OF WATER GUSHING IN WAS SO GREAT
THAT IT SHEARED OFF THE HEAD OF ONE OF THE
MINERS, AS WAS
DISCOVERED WHEN THE BODY AND HEAD WERE RECOVERED SEPARATELY.
SOURCE SAID THAT BECAUSE OF THE HIGH ATMOSPHERIC PRESSURE--
RISING TO 30 ATMOSPHERES AT 1100 FEET--THERE WAS NEVER ANY
CHANCE OF SURVIVORS. THE AUTHORITIES REPORTEDLY KNEW THIS
WITHIN FORTY-FIVE MINUTES, BUT SPOKE ABOUT POSSIBLE SUR-
VIVORS IN AIR POCKETS IN ORDER TO KEEP UP MORALE.

4. SOURCE REPORTS THAT MANAGERS WERE UNDER PRESSURE FROM
HIGHER AUTHORITIES TO PRODUCE MORE COAL, AND WERE THREAT-
ENED THAT IF PRODUCTION OF CHAS NALA MINE DID NOT REACH EX-
PECTED LEVEL, MINE WOULD BE CLOSED DOWN. SOME MINING
ENGINEERS WITH WHOM SOURCE SPOKE BLAME THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
FOR MINE SAFETY (DGMS) FOR HAVING GIVEN PERMISSION FOR
BLASTING WHERE THE CONDITIONS OF THE BARRIER AND THE AMOUNT
OF WATER IN THE UPPER SEAMS WERE FULLY KNOWN. THEY THINK
THAT INSTEAD THE DGMS SHOULD HAVE ALLOWED ONLY HANDPICK
MINING WITHOUT BLASTING. EXPERTS, AS WELL AS EXPERIENCED
OVERMEN AND MINING SARDARS (THE SUBORDINATES OF THE
OVERMEN), BELIEVE THAT THIS EMPHASIS ON PRODUCTION OVER
SAFETY WILL EITHER FORCE THE CLOSURE OF OTHER INDIAN IRON
AND STEEL COMPANY (IISCO) AND BHARAT COKING COAL LIMITED
(BCCL) MINES OR WILL LEAD TO FURTHER DISASTERS. AS AN
EXAMPLE OF BAD PRACTICES, THEY CITE THE KHASJOYRAMPUR
COLZDIERY IN THE JHARIA FIELD--A BCCL MINE. THERE THE
GALLERIES HAVE BEEN ROBBED OF PILLARS AND WIDENED FROM TEN
TO 35 FEET SINCE NATIONALIZATION. MINING EXPERTS WHO
WORKED IN CHAS NALA FOR MANY YEARS REPORTEDLYSAID THAT
THEY COULD NOT HAVE IMAGINED SUCH POOR CONDITIONS AND LACK
OF SAFETY STANDARDS OCCURRING WHEN THE MINES WERE IN THE
PRIVATE SECTOR.
KORN UNQUOTE SAXBE

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